

- High personal values and stable
- Adequate general technical background.

A discussion followed emphasizing the value of participation in campus and curriculum activities. The importance of an advisors role.

The group concluded that the basic skills list developed by the group are so basic, that they are the essence of what graduates today and in the future will need to be in demand and function successfully in industry.

Careers in Transition: A Look at You in Your Job

Gary L. Peterson

Thirty years ago I was taking my first major steps away from our small family farm. As I began college I did not know what I wanted to do with my life, but I was quite certain it did not include agriculture. As I continued school I decided I wanted to be a teacher, probably at secondary level. Before I finished my undergraduate degree I was positive that I did not want to teach at secondary level. As a result of those important choices and decisions I found myself on the track for a career in higher education.

Several years ago, as a direct result of some involvement in faculty development programs. I discovered I was raising questions which I have by now heard from many others in my profession: "Is this what I want to do until I'm 65 or 70 years old?" "Where am I headed in this career?" "How far and fast am I falling behind what is going on in my discipline or in society?" Because I was asking those questions of myself, I requested an opportunity to serve as coordinator and to work with faculty at my institution in a grant program focused on Careers in Transition.

The Careers in Transition program at my home institution was based on several premises:

1. There are many people in higher education who are unhappy with their roles as professor, who would like to have other life and career options.
2. There are faculty members who ought to be given an opportunity to change or move to something else.
3. Academics, like others, have experienced life changes and need to reexamine the assumptions, the plans or circumstances which brought them to this point.
4. Colleges and universities are increasingly faced with conditions where their faculty personnel are relatively stable, tenured—in, and with little reason

for shifts and mobility that existed only a few years earlier. Such conditions can lead to institutional, program, and personal stagnation.

These premises were sorely tested in our grant program. As program coordinator I was treated by some of my colleagues as a leper, as an academic Judas. I was told point blank by one colleague that I had now completely sold my soul to the administration and to the corporate mentality. I was shunned by some faculty who saw only in the program goals an attempt to eliminate the "deadwood" professors. And no one wishes to be self-labelled as over-the-hill, obsolete, or even in many cases, as doubting their own competence or decision to be a college teacher.

But for all the battles for respectability and credibility, I learned some important lessons. First, I discovered an immense amount of material about adult development and life stages which for me was both enlightening and comforting. I was eventually able to share much of that with other faculty members.

Secondly, I discovered beneath the premises of the grant program, there were many real needs for personal and professional development. Most faculty do admit personal, institutional, or professional changes and stresses, and they wish to deal more effectively with those changes.

Next, I eventually discovered what could have been some highly predictable responses from faculty colleagues:

- From a 45 year old full professor — "Is this what I want to do for another 20-25 years — teach the same classes over and over again?"
- From a 58 year old professor — "You mean I can actually take an early retirement and do some of those things I have wanted to do all my life?"
- From a 30 year old assistant professor, four years at the institution — "I wanted to talk to you privately, because, you know I'm non-tenured. If my doubts and concerns were public, that's all some of my colleagues would need to question my commitment to teaching here."
- From a 40 year old associate professor — "You know, I really like young people. But I'm finding that my values and their values are further and further apart. I'm finding that students are not responding to me as they once did — nor I to them."
- From a 33 year old instructor, part-time - "You mean you will help me do this assessment, work up a plan, help with a support group, and that this could lead to a different job, a better job?"
- From a 35 year old associate professor, recently tenured - "I really don't enjoy teaching. I don't have to teach for a living. What I really want to do is have a small farm, a few animals ..."

The faculty members who expressed those feelings needed to respond to change and to challenge. In my position I became a counselor and a resource. I

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discovered that I was a facilitator in helping faculty members explore their own life situations — their interests, their values and priorities, their skills, their goals and directions. I provided information and encouragement to act.

Now, let me address what I believe these personal experiences have to do with this NACTA conference. The conference theme, "Agriculture Curriculum and the Changing Student" acknowledges change and challenge. Adaptability is assumed. How we deal personally with the situation will invariably determine our sense of achievement, our level of involvement, our happiness, stress, attitudes — even our sense of prosperity.

We can look at declining enrollments, at an "Aging" (maturing?) faculty, at human resource shortfalls in agricultural research and technology, at lack of recognition — or at dozens of other so-called problems — and we can make decisions about how we respond. In many places, faculties are responding in such ways as retrenchment, renewal, retraining. Other options are generally well known: fight, flight, resist, embrace, adapt, prepare, plan, be reactive, or be proactive and make changes happen the way we want them to happen.

Inherent with challenge and change in jobs, disciplines, or society, is the need to make personal and professional change. For some college faculty there is little pressure to change; for some there is little perceived need to change; and for many, there may be ample pressure and need but precious little time or opportunity to plan and prepare properly.

In addition, institutions or disciplines may provide little incentive or reward for making the effort. Faculty development programs still tend to be spotty and inconsistent. Many have come as a result of special grants and temporary, "soft" support monies. Few of us in higher education are ever required to upgrade, to take so many continuing education units (CEU's), to be certified or re-certified.

What may be even more inhibiting than the lack of incentives may be the failures of the reward system. Many college teachers — yourselves included — are likely to be perceived as dealing with the unglamorous fields of study. Thus you do the unpublicized, the nearly invisible tasks, the "grunt work" which is supposed to have its own internal rewards. You may well feel like the offensive lineman on a football team.

Recommendations

Even if there are few incentives, few rewards, or few institutional helps to direct personal and professional development efforts, there are steps which can be taken to adapt and respond.

I. Personal Level

In order to make judicious use of professional leave and professional development opportunities, you would do well to work yourself through a searching

self-assessment. Examining your own interests, values, priorities, and developmental changes in looking at what has happened and is happening to you. Examine closely what has happened and is likely to happen to your discipline, to your students, and to your institutions. Not that you can plan or control every element that operates externally, but there are great personal rewards when you have a firmer sense of managing your own career or life.

As a step in this self assessment, prepare a personal development plan or contract. Many institutions now require such plans from any faculty member who applies for sabbatical leaves, summer conferences, short courses, or even conferences. The principle is to make your participation part of a design — whether your institution requires it or not.

II. Departmental/College/School Level

At the unit level, establish policies which encourage personal and professional development which also benefits the department program. This means coordinated leaves and projects, an overall plan and design which includes what I need and what we need. Such action does not need institutional or administrative approval.

An illustration: Projections and trends suggest that a certain curricular area will be significant in the near future. Indeed many programs already have it. You do not now have a faculty specialist to handle the new area. You are not likely to get an additional faculty member to teach in that area. Your options: fall behind with an inferior and outdated program or develop someone presently on staff to handle the new area. As a departmental effort, one or several faculty persons can be designated to upgrade through a renewal process. Thus, both departmental and personal professional development plans must be prepared and coordinated.

III. Faculty Internships

Consider seriously the values of a faculty internship as a development opportunity. An internship, or arrangement to be "employed" by a business, a government agency, or research program offers unequalled opportunities to learn first hand, to develop in new areas, to apply your skills to a new field.

If you do explore internship possibilities, remember the following:

1. You likely have dozens of contacts, people who can be approached about an internship for yourself — or perhaps introduce you or direct you to others.
2. Do not enter into internships solely with the idea that this will make a learning experience, that you will be better equipped for curriculum development or with many new experiences to use directly in your teaching. Those things will likely be true, but do not overlook the fact that you have skills and knowledge to bring to an organization. Ideally the arrangements for an internship include pay for your time, expertise, and assistance. Also, an internship should

not be regarded as "moonlighting" or a "summer job" but as part of that development plan.

3. Internship arrangements should be formalized to a degree. Letters of understanding and agreement, even contractual statements should be drafted and signed by all parties to an internship.

4. Do not overlook the value of an internship experience for research, for curriculum and course redesign, for sharing with students and colleagues. Results are often worth publication and reporting at conferences.

Conclusion

You can take firmer control through life and career planning. There are many excellent contemporary materials available which can be useful as self-help guides through the process. For models of personal development plans, internship agreements, support groups, or for internship reports or evaluations you can contact me at my home institution.

I close by encouraging you to assess and to plan. I challenge you to do so, and to report and share your results at conferences such as this national forum.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

re: Field Study Opportunities

I find Dr. Mark Headings "Field study opportunities — a unique learning experience" fascinating reading (March, page 25). He appears to have resolved three major problems faced by those of us who have tried overseas field study sessions: 1) securing advanced study credits for students, 2) finding adequate logistic support facilities to find the superior students that profit most from the field study experience, and 3) receiving field assistance for housing, feeding, and moving students in the visited country.

My experiences ("A plea for a new kind of post-graduate education" NACTA 26(2):14-15) during three major off-campus two-week field studies (Western USA, Costa Rica, and Japan) demonstrated to me the necessity of finding support from outside the college administration for numbers 2 & 3.

Problem Number 2 — recruiting students — has proven to be the most difficult to resolve. At our University the practice is to turn recruitment over to a commercial tour operator for a fee. This has not proven to be practical when it is agricultural students that are wanted for the field study opportunity. All the tour companies we have considered have admitted that their experience has been only for the Liberal Arts groups, for the obvious reasons that this is by far the largest pool of student prospects and traditionally the students from the most wealthy families. My experience thus supports Headings' recommendation that the Instructor plan to do his own recruiting.

Problem number 3 — support when in the field — requires, in my experience, a thorough on-site inspection of all facilities to be needed. Headings urges this: it really should be considered a must. Student safety, as well as classroom efficiency, is at stake. Enough things will not happen as planned. But that on-site, detailed inspection then can lead to a fine working relationship with a travel agency in the land to be visited. The detailed travel, housing & food services, and the visits to cooperating local people can be made into a tightly structured program that makes every hour in the country useful.

The Kintetsu Travel Agency in Japan, for example, took my rough schedule from my two preliminary visits to Japan and produced an hour-by-hour schedule that worked perfectly. On-site observations from preliminary visits to Singapore and Malaysia, also to Israel and South Africa, are being used by us to create the rough schedules for use by local travel agencies for the 1985 American Seed Institute field studies planned for Singapore/Malaysia and Israel/South Africa.

For US or Bahama field studies, Headings suggests that the International Field Studies, Inc. of Columbus, Ohio may be an answer for the on-site arrangements. This group owns a plane for certain off-shore travel requirements.

Field studies can offer an exhilarating change of pace for the Instructor. They are well worth the fuss involved. Enrichment comes from both the students and the cooperating local people. ASI in Costa Rica devoted two weeks to studying pollination for commercial seed production with people and facilities that cannot be duplicated anywhere in the world. ASI-Japan devoted two weeks to closed door sessions with the presidents and operating heads of a series of great vegetable and flower breeding and seed producing organizations, as well as the research directors. Such exposure opens vistas that allow sharpening the classroom experiences of other students in subsequent courses on campus.

Headings article paper ought to be read by anyone interested in exploring new ways to increase teaching effectiveness. And the University of Nevada experiences with the American Seed Institute field study program is available to all.

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